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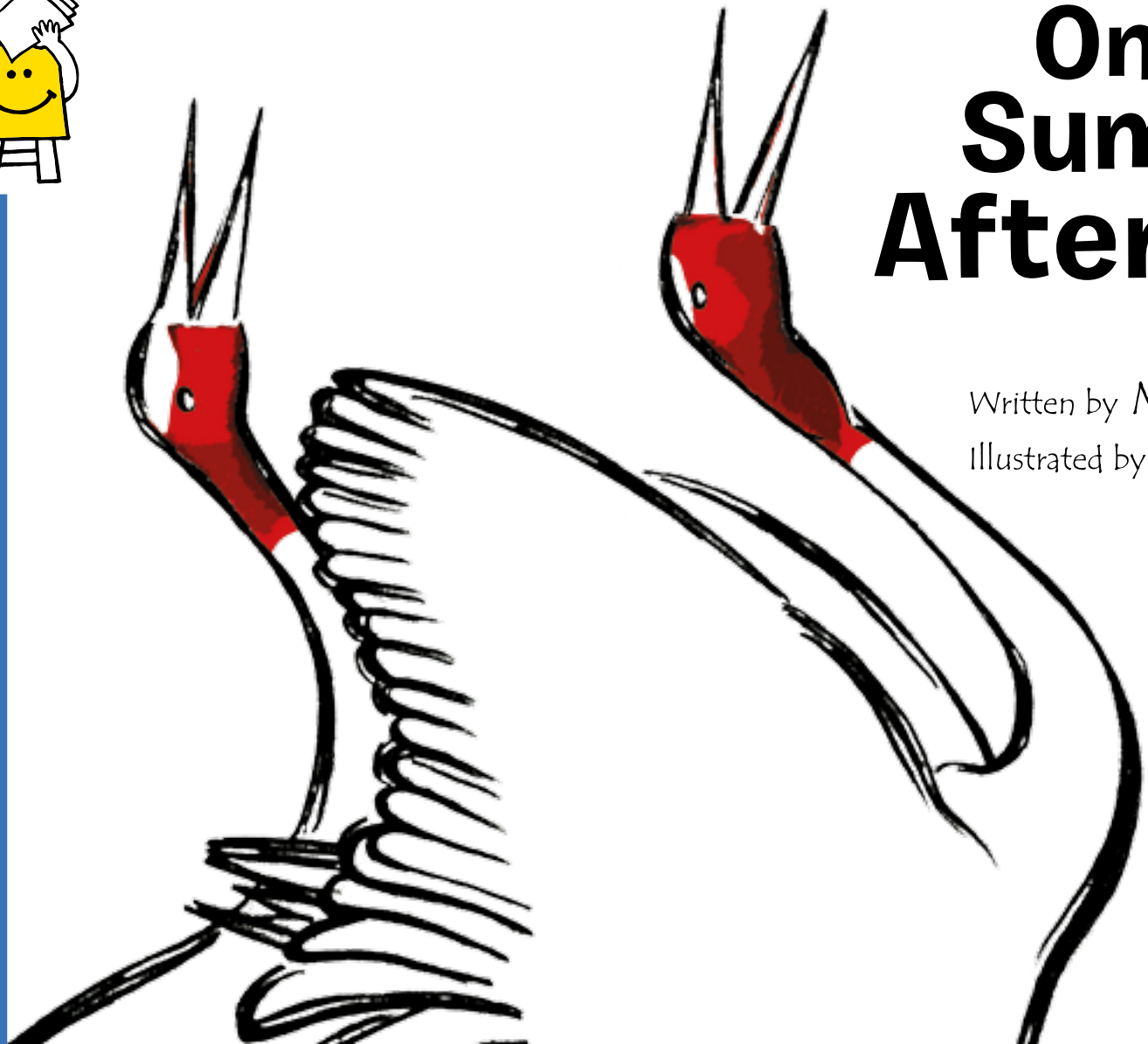

# One Summer Afternoon

Written by Mahipal
Illustrated by Kanika Nair

Original story in Hindi **'Saras'** by Mahipal
Illustrations: Kanika Nair
**'One Summer Afternoon'** — English Translation by Manisha Chaudhry
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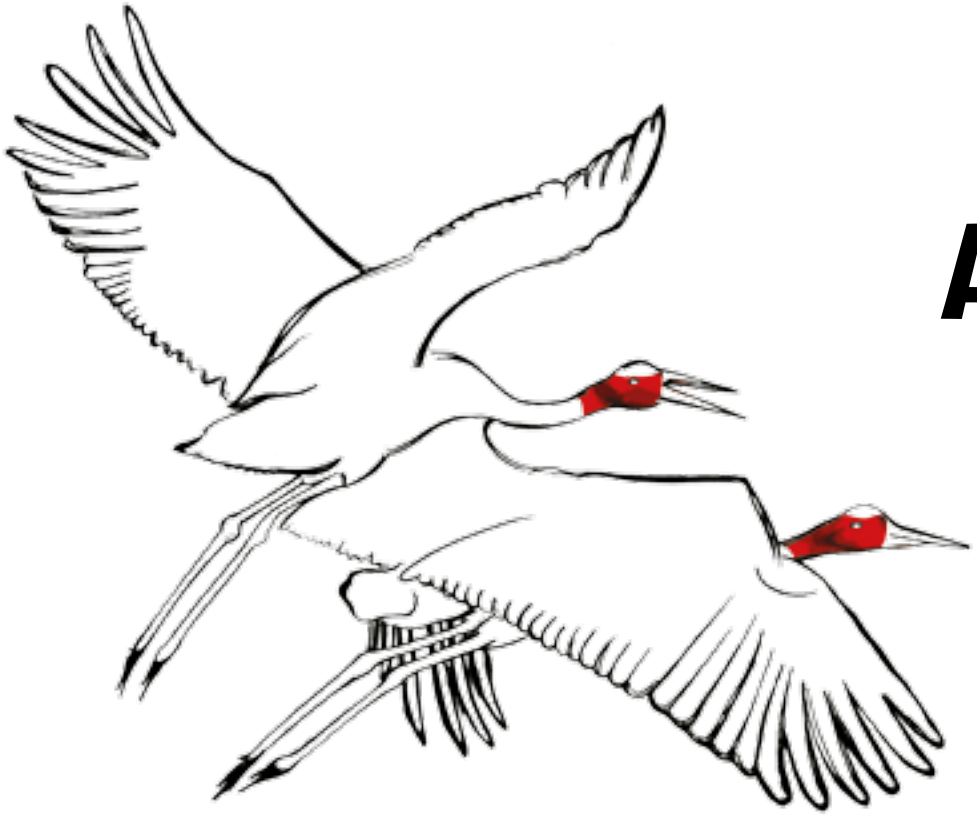


# One Summer Afternoon

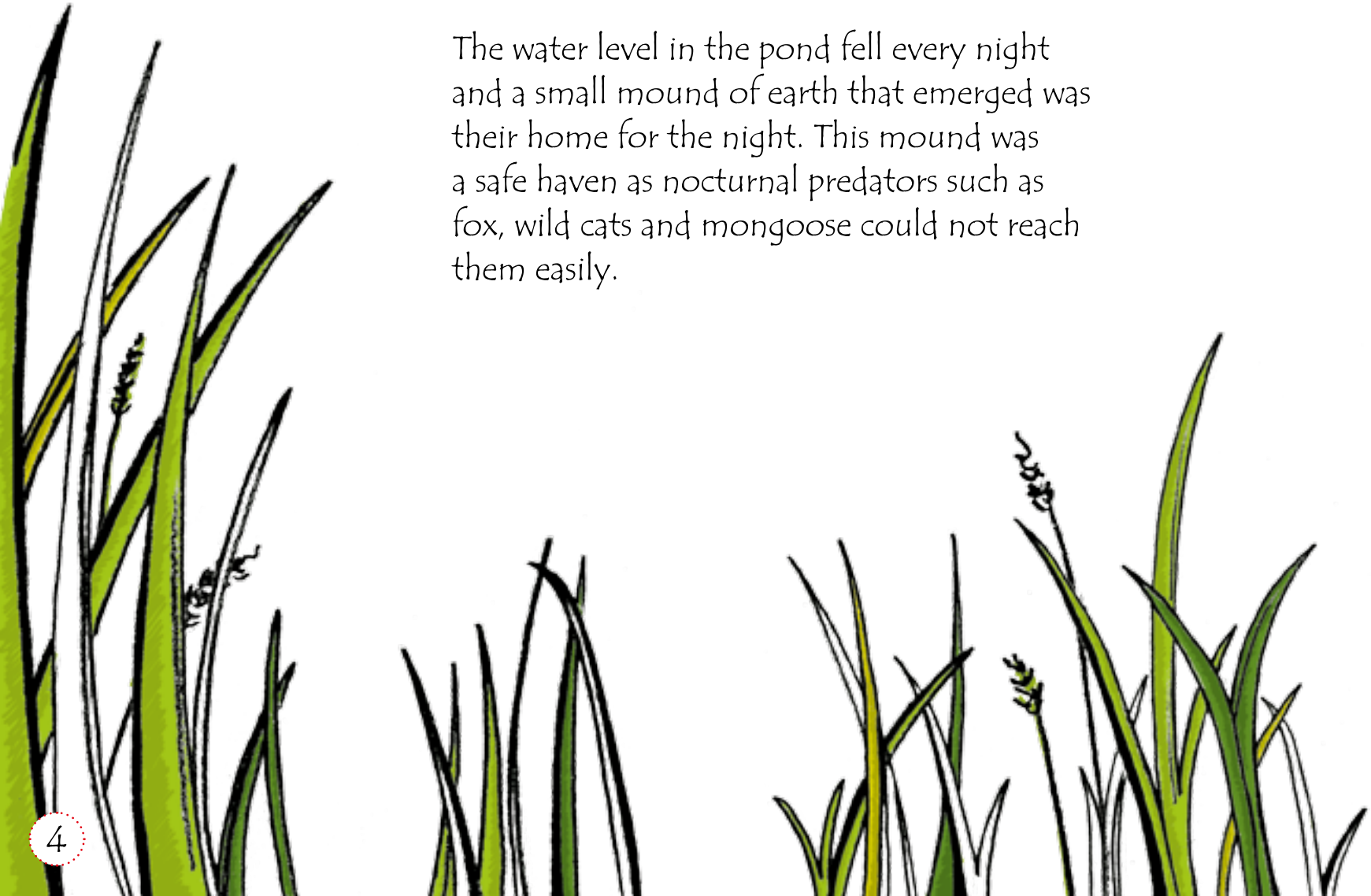
Written by Mahipal

Illustrated by Kanika Nair

English translation by
Manisha Chaudhry

The large pond on the south-eastern side of our village was home to many species of birds and animals. Along with waterfowl and herons, there also lived a pair of cranes. They trawled from one end of the lake to the other looking for tasty food.

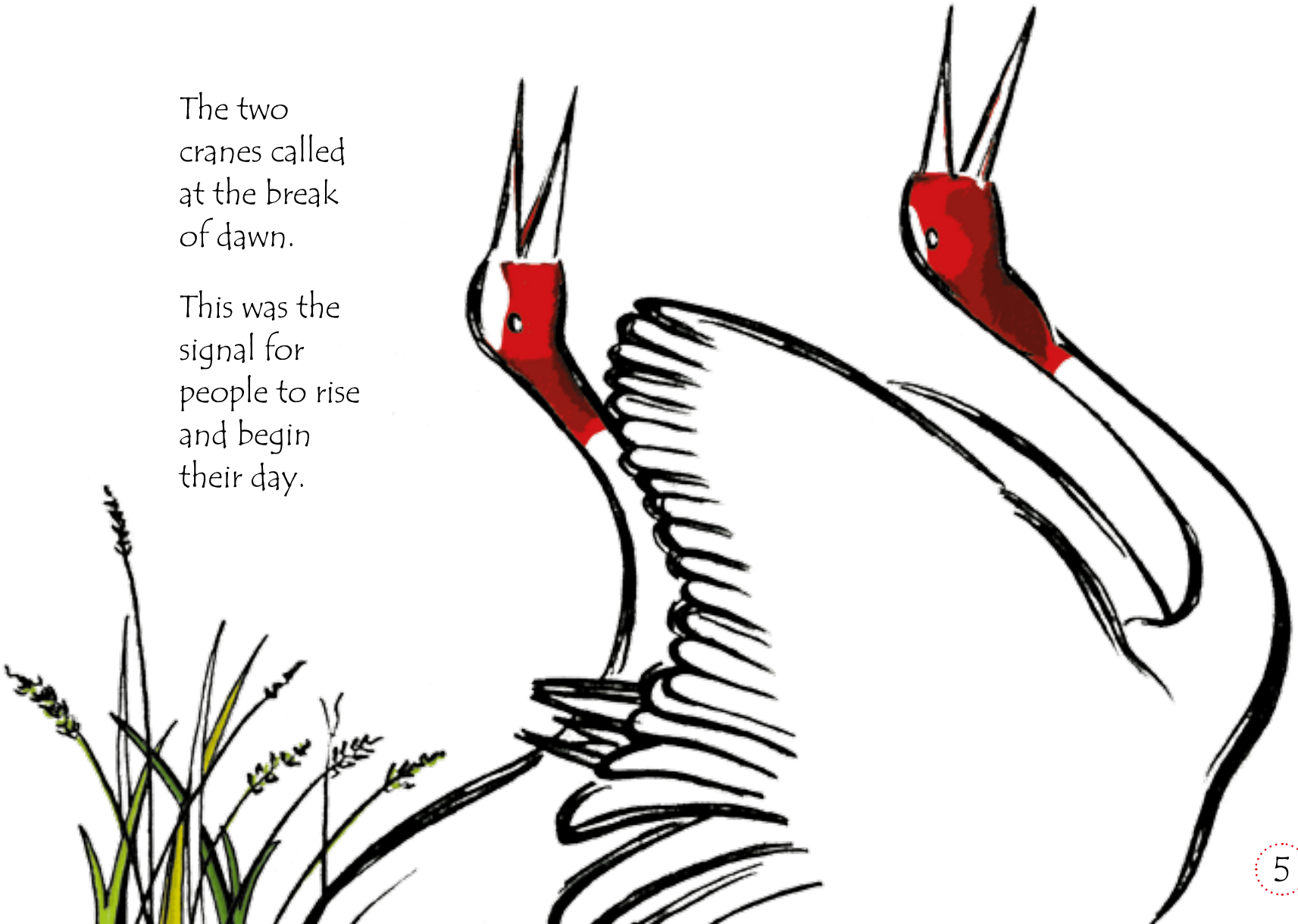
We often spotted them with desperately flailing fish held in their beaks.



The water level in the pond fell every night and a small mound of earth that emerged was their home for the night. This mound was a safe haven as nocturnal predators such as fox, wild cats and mongoose could not reach them easily.

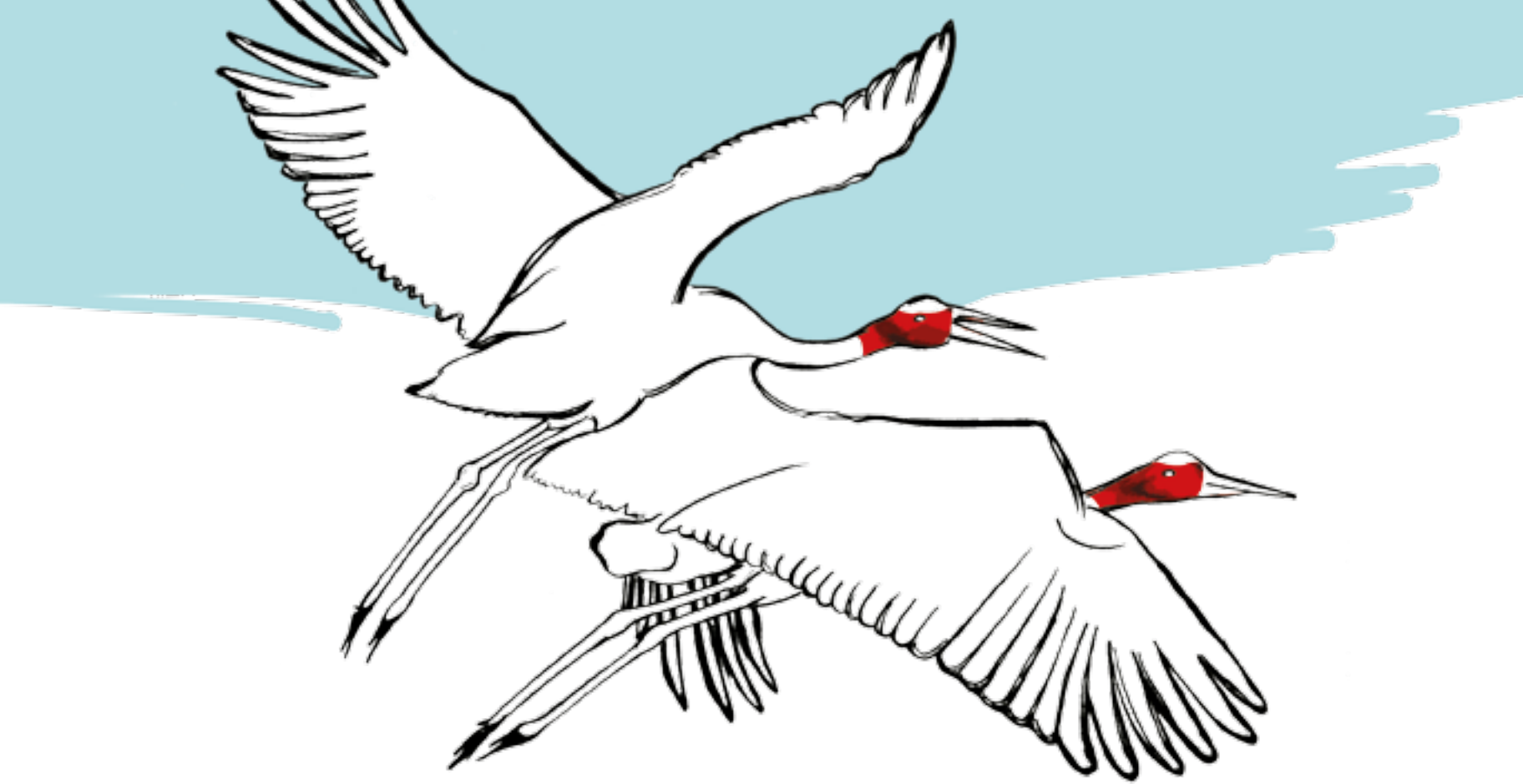
The two cranes called at the break of dawn.

This was the signal for people to rise and begin their day.



I had never been able to see the pair of cranes at close quarters. Whenever we approached them, they would immediately move away with long-legged strides.

Their bright red beaks and the velvety glimmer on their necks looked enchanting. Sometimes, we would run after them. When this mood seized us, they either moved to some place that was beyond our reach, or took a short flight that left us far behind in their wake. Often they would perch on the mound of earth inside the pond.



At the end of the monsoon, we spotted a little crane along with the pair. He marched proudly between the long-legged ones, matching them step for step. I was utterly fascinated by the little crane. I would try very hard to get close to him but the older pair kept me firmly at bay.

One day, some of us boys from the village entered the pond to pluck some lotus flowers.

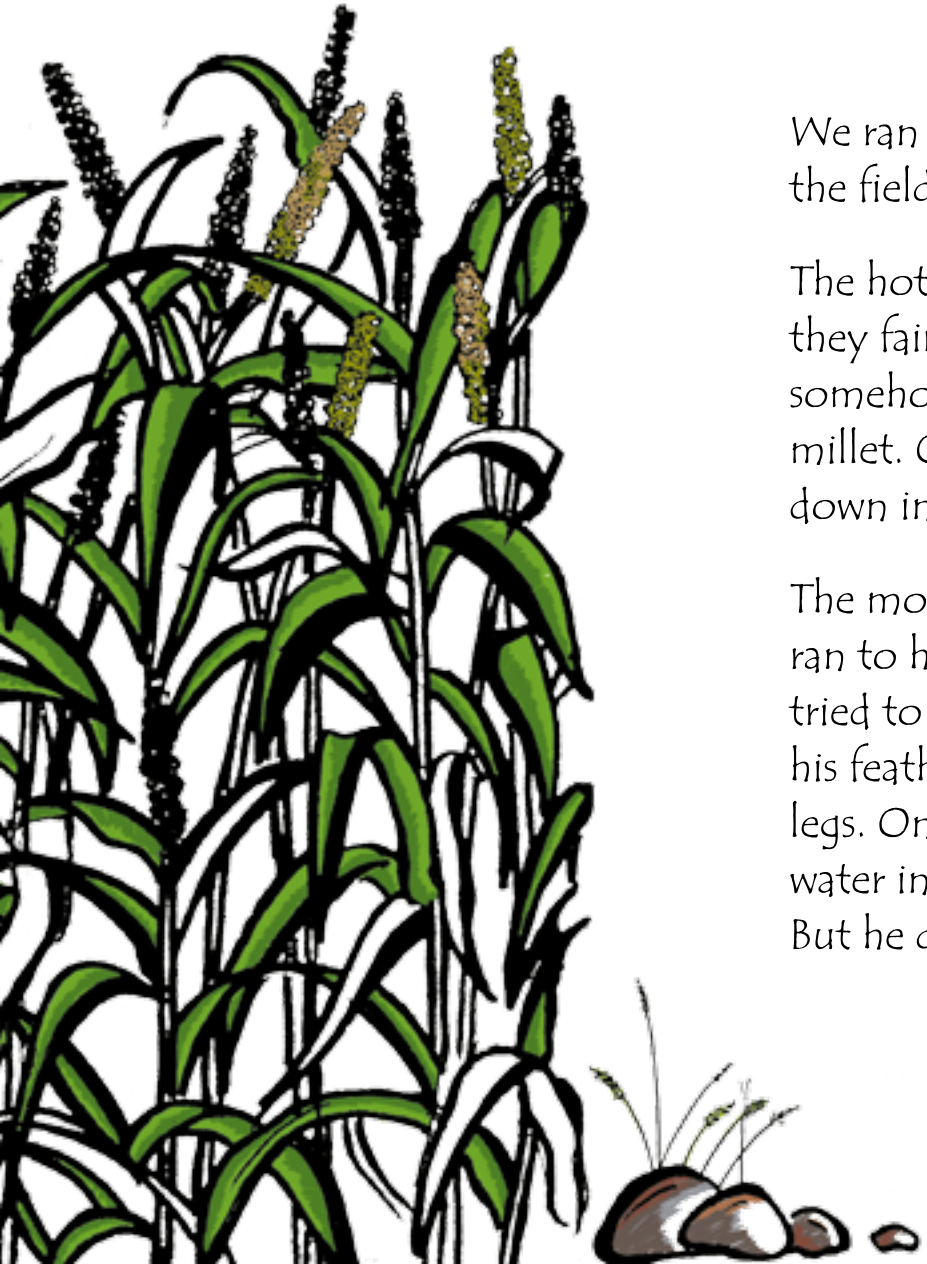
It was the middle of the afternoon. Everything seemed silent and still in the lazy heat of the sun. The people who worked their fields from dawn would go home by the afternoon.

We spotted the pair of cranes in the pond, playing with the baby crane. All of us took it into our heads to chase the little crane.

As the pair of cranes ran pell-mell, they lost the little crane somewhere.

All of us wanted to catch the little crane but he eluded us. He was not able to fly as yet but so swiftly did he move that none of us were able to keep up. He moved left and he moved right and we couldn't catch him.

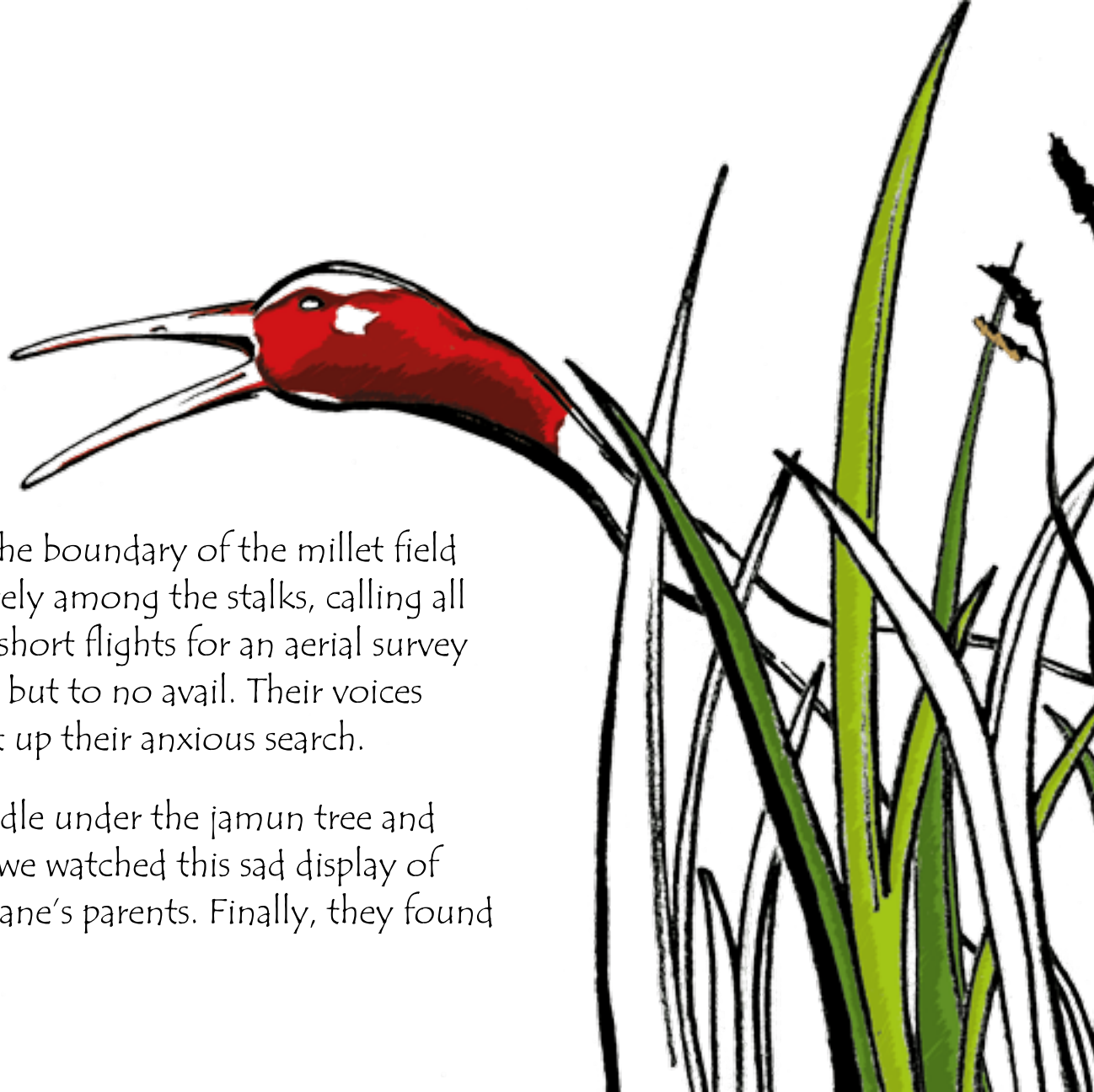
We were so intent on pursuing him that none of us stopped to think that even if we did manage to catch him, how would he survive without his parents?



We ran and we ran among the stalks of millet in the fields, hell-bent upon catching him.

The hot sun beat down on our heads so that they fairly clicked and crackled. The little crane somehow managed to emerge from the field of millet. One of us aimed a stick at him. He fell down instantly!

The moment he fell, we all froze in dismay. We ran to his side and tried to revive him. Someone tried to prop him up while someone else stroked his feathers. Another boy straightened his thin legs. One of us ran to the pond and brought some water in cupped palms and dribbled it on his beak. But he did not rise again.



His parents combed the boundary of the millet field and searched desperately among the stalks, calling all the while. They took short flights for an aerial survey and continued to call but to no avail. Their voices grew dim as they kept up their anxious search.

We all stood in a huddle under the jamun tree and berated our friend as we watched this sad display of love from the little crane's parents. Finally, they found their baby.

As soon as they saw him they stood facing each other and spread their wings as if to protect the little one and gently stroked him with their beaks. They stood and wailed and mourned their little one for a very long time, shielding him with the canopy of their wings. Sometimes they would raise their beaks heavenwards and cry. They would flap their wings and raise their voices together. Sometimes they cried separately. Their pain turned into tears dripping from our eyes.

As the evening shadows lengthened, bereft of hope, the pair of cranes left.

I have never forgotten this incident from my childhood. Perhaps the crane family showed me how we must love all living beings without wanting to possess them.

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Pratham Books was set up in 2004, as part of the Read India movement, a nation-wide campaign to promote reading among children. Pratham Books is a not-for-profit organization that publishes quality books for children in multiple Indian languages. Our mission is to see "a book in every child's hand" and democratize the joy of reading. If you would like to contribute to our mission, please email us at info@prathambooks.org.

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Born in a small village of Alipur Khera in Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh, Mahipal worked as a typist in the tehsil court premises. He had an inclination towards literature right from the beginning. After joining the Hindi department of the American Embassy in 1985, he began writing and translating. He has a PG diploma in translation from IGNOU.

For Kanika Nair, illustration has always been a passion. After a BA (Hons) degree in Communication Design from Pearl Academy of Fashion, New Delhi, she works as a freelance illustrator and designer for children's books.

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